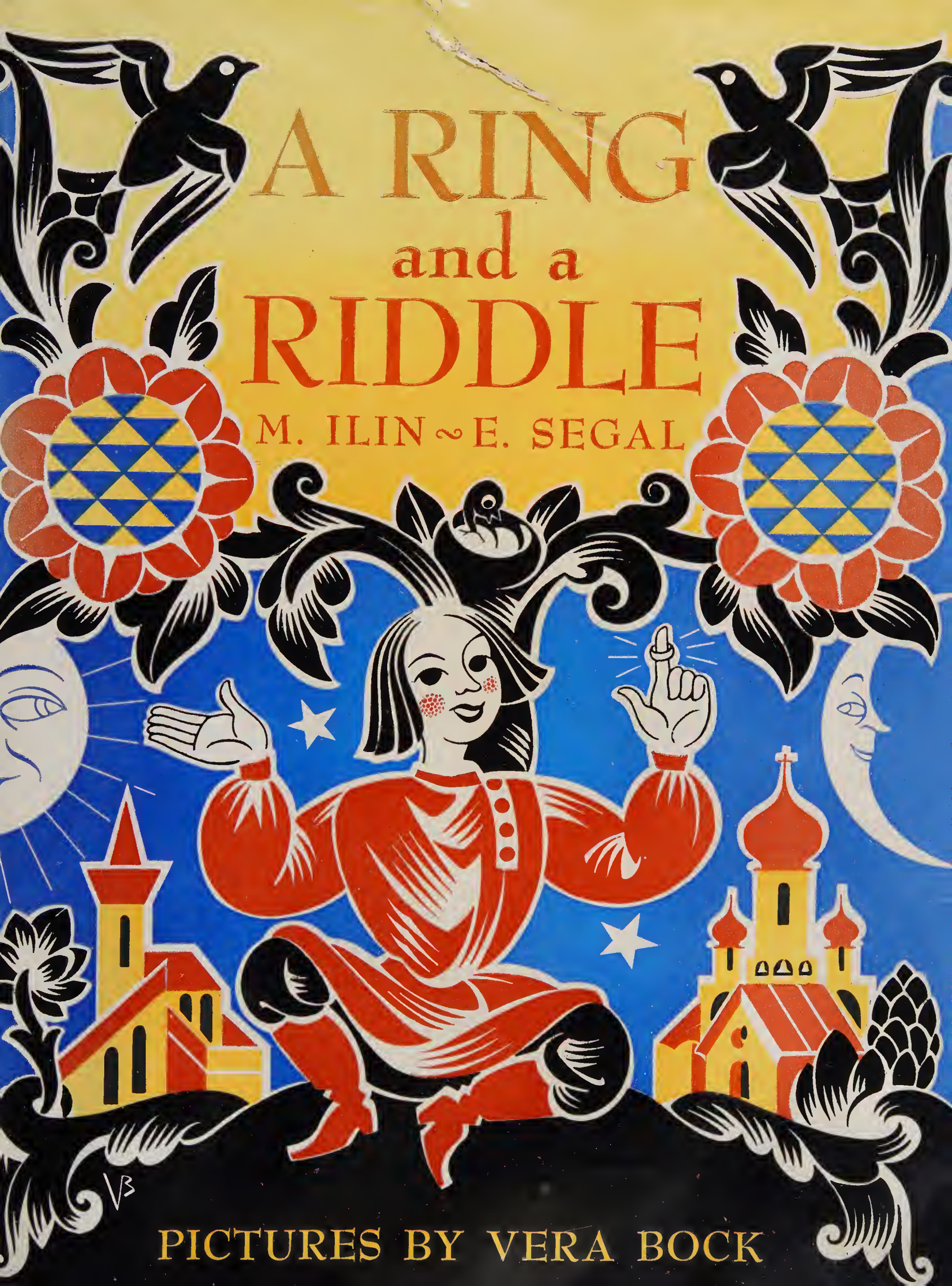
A RING and a RIDDLE

M. ILIN ~ E. SEGAL



PICTURES BY VERA BOCK

A RING AND A RIDDLE

By M. Ilin and E. Segal

Translated from the Russian by
Beatrice Kinkead

When Ivan set out with his father's rusty ax to seek his fortune, he couldn't decide which road to take. Would it be the one to the right, to the left, or the one straight ahead? Then he met a beautiful maiden, who gave him a magic ring and said, "Follow the ring and don't turn back."

Up a steep, stony path, through a deep forest, across a roaring river danced the magic ring. Ivan had to work hard to keep up with the spinning gold circle. If it hadn't been for a self-sawing saw, a self-hammering hammer, a crystal apple, a magic towel and a pair of seven-league boots, he would have had to work even harder.

Did Ivan ever turn back? When you read about his magic adventures, you will find the answer to that question as well as to the riddle of the magic ring.

This is a Junior Literary Guild selection, having been chosen by the Editorial Board consisting of Helen Ferris, Angelo Patri, Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Mrs. Sidonie M. Gruenberg as an outstanding publication of the month for boys and girls (P Group).

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A RING AND A RIDDLE

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

How Man Became a Giant

By M. Ilin

TURNING NIGHT INTO DAY

BLACK ON WHITE

WHAT TIME IS IT?

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

a RING and a RIDDLE

by M. ILIN and E. SEGAL

Translated by
BEATRICE KINKEAD

Illustrated by
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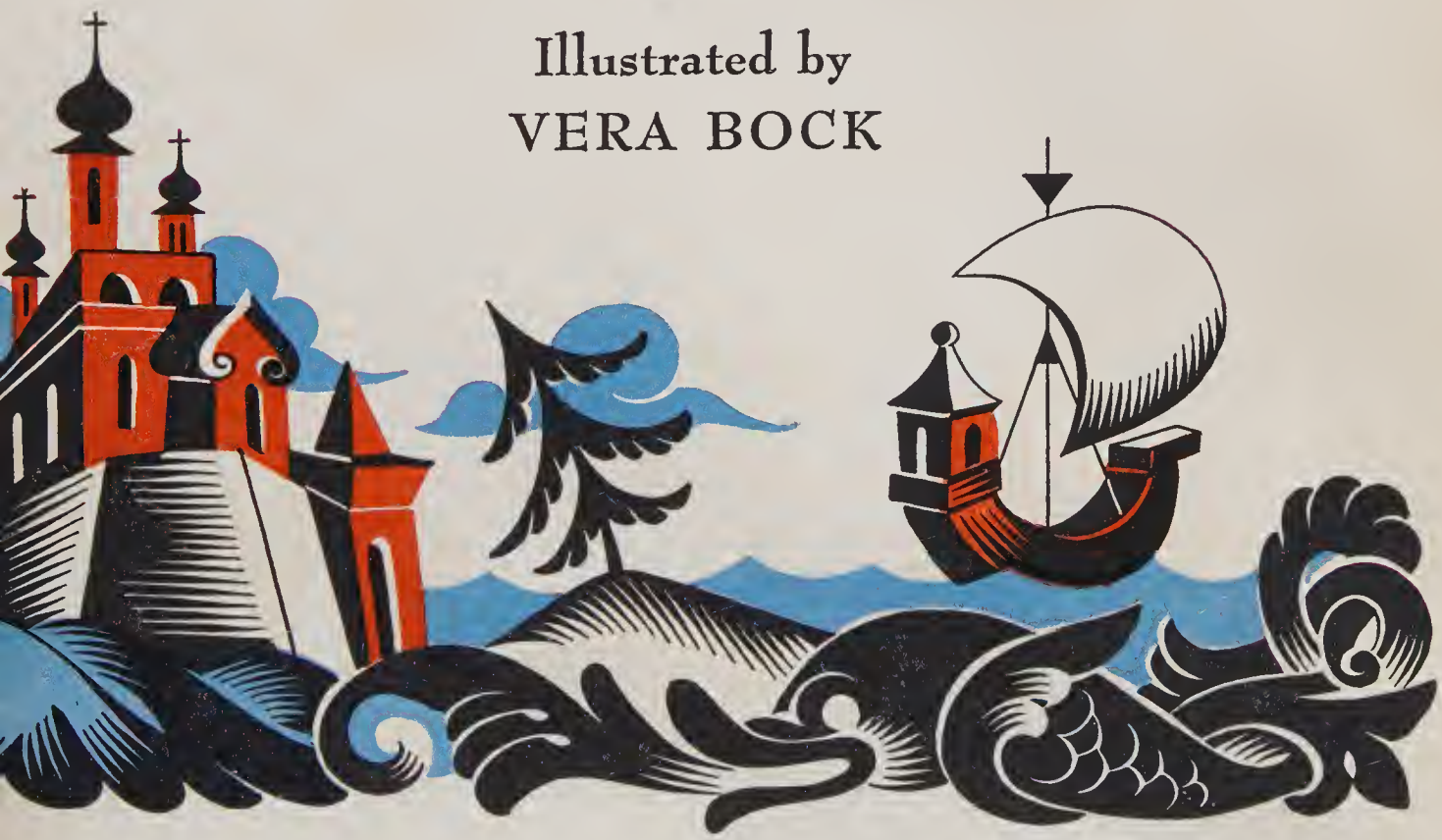

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This is not just an ordinary fairy story—it is a riddle-story. First you must read the story, then guess what it means. All the magic things in it really exist in the world. Guess what each one is!

nce upon a time there was an old fisherman. He lived on the shore of the sea with his three sons. The old man died and his sons divided among themselves what he had left. It wasn't much. The oldest got the little straw-thatched hut, the second got an old tattered fish net, and all

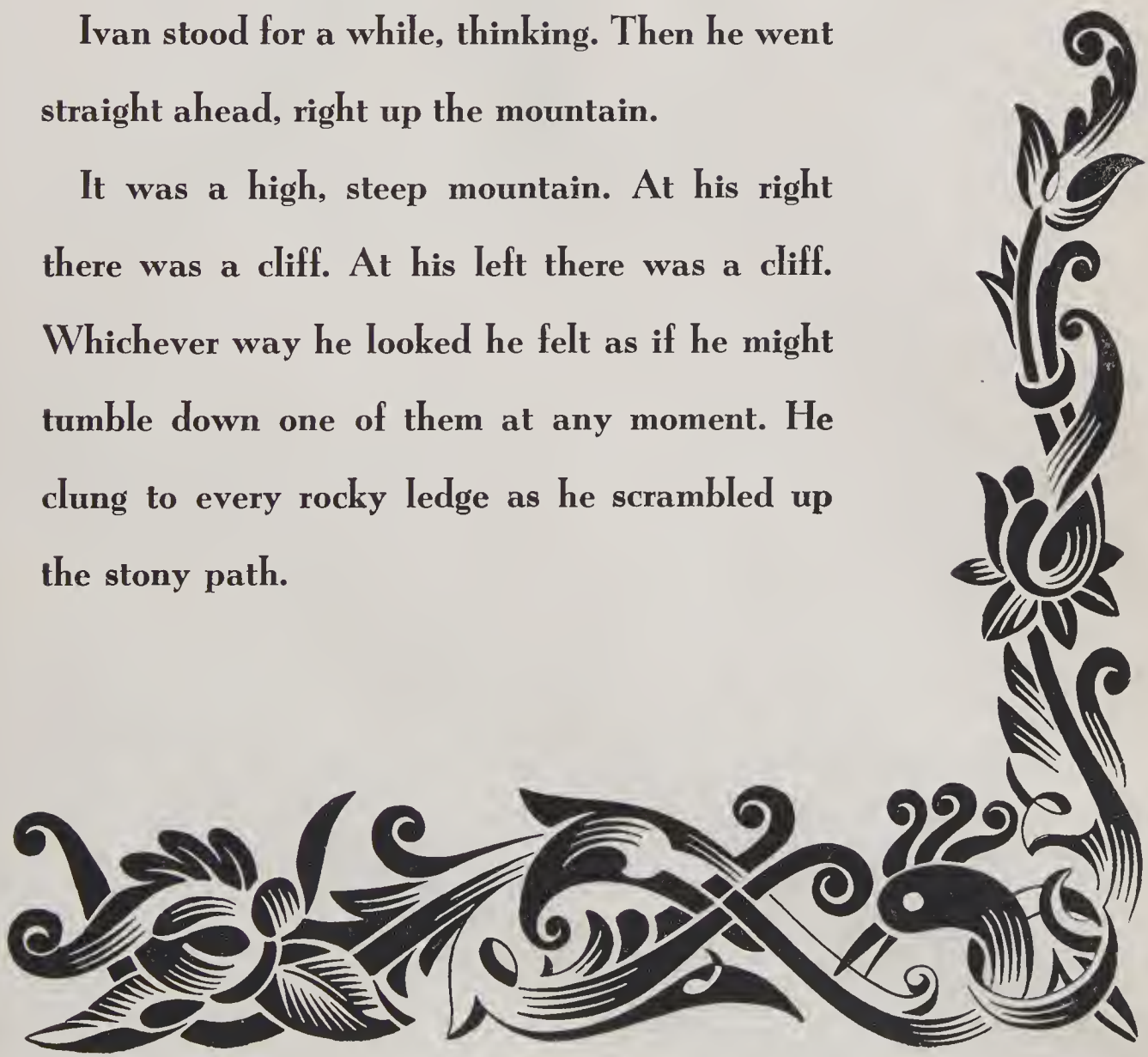
that was left for Ivan, the youngest, was a rusty axe. Ivan tucked the axe into his belt, put a loaf of bread into a knapsack and slung it over his shoulder. Then he said good-bye to his brothers and set out to seek his fortune. He had walked along the highway for a long time when he saw a post ahead of him. The road branched here in three directions.

On the post was written: "If you take the road to the right you will always have enough to eat. If you go to the left you will always have enough to drink. If you go straight ahead you will make your fortune."

Ivan looked at the road leading to the right. It was wide and level. The one leading to the left was wider still. But the road that went straight ahead was a steep, narrow footpath winding up the mountain in sharp curves.

Ivan stood for a while, thinking. Then he went straight ahead, right up the mountain.

It was a high, steep mountain. At his right there was a cliff. At his left there was a cliff. Whichever way he looked he felt as if he might tumble down one of them at any moment. He clung to every rocky ledge as he scrambled up the stony path.



Suddenly, from around a sharp turn in the stony path, he saw a beautiful maiden coming towards him.

"Where are you going, young man?" she asked.

"I am going to seek my fortune, fair lady," said Ivan.

"That's a hard task you have undertaken. It is not so easy to find a fortune. But, if you are determined, I will help you."

And as she spoke the maiden took a ring from her finger and gave it to Ivan.

"Take this ring of mine," she said, "and wherever it goes, go after it. It will show you the way. Don't be afraid, but follow the ring and don't turn back. People will offer you silver and gold. Don't take them. Keep on going straight ahead. And if you should get into trouble, just blow on this horn and I will come to your rescue."

Ivan had hardly got the ring and the horn in his

hands when the beautiful maiden disappeared completely. He dropped the ring to the ground. It fell with a clink and started rolling along the path. Off he went after it.

Ivan walked and walked and walked along the mountain trail. At his right was a steep cliff straight down. At his left was another cliff straight up. The ring rolled on and on.

Suddenly there was a terrible roar and the

mountain shook. A huge boulder had broken loose at the summit of the mountain and came crashing down the mountainside. It landed right across Ivan's path, completely blocking his way.

A loud echo from the mountain seemed to be saying: "Turn back! Don't come here!" But the little ring hopped right over the big boulder and kept rolling on along the path.

When Ivan saw that the ring was about to get away from him, he didn't stop to think. He grabbed hold of the rock with both hands and tried to move it out of the way. He pushed and shoved but it didn't budge. He tried it again and

this time it gave an inch or so. Ivan took a deep breath and tried a third time with all his might and main. This time the boulder moved and went crashing down the side of the mountain.

A long echo, that sounded like a groan, again rumbled through the mountain. Ivan glanced down at the spot where the boulder had rested and saw something glittering on the ground.

"Hm! Maybe that's a treasure," he thought.

He stooped over to see and there among the stones lay not a treasure but a saw. He picked it up and examined it.

"Well, I'll take it along with me," he said dis-

appointedly. "Maybe it will come in handy someday."

Suddenly he remembered the ring. "But where is the ring? Evidently it is not going to wait for me!" Away ahead he saw it shining brightly. And he hurried along the path to catch up with it.

Ivan got out of the mountains and was walking along the road, the ring rolling merrily ahead of him, when off in the distance he saw a wall of forest. As he approached it he saw that it was a fir forest a hundred years old. The trees grew so close together it was almost impossible to make his way between them. But the little ring glided in between the tree trunks and kept rolling right along through the thick undergrowth. It was easy for so small a ring to get through anywhere.

Ivan went right after the ring, squeezing between tree trunks and beating his way through the underbrush. A loud roar sounded through the

woods. The fir trees shook their branches at him. But Ivan was not frightened. He kept on beating his way ahead. The branches of the fir trees clawed at him, grabbed him, scratched and beat him, tried to gouge out his eyes. They surrounded him on all sides and wouldn't let him take a step.

Ivan laid his saw and his knapsack down on the ground. He took his axe out of his belt and began to hack his way through. To his surprise, the saw jumped up and began to saw away at the trees all by itself! A loud groan echoed through the forest as the fir trees fell to the ground one after another.

"Whew!" said Ivan. "That is no common saw I found under that boulder. Imagine, a saw that saws by itself!"

The saw understood its business. It kept right on sawing away at the trees. And the trees gave way, bowing low to Ivan and letting him pass.

On his way through the woods, he picked out a nice thick limb on one of the trees, chopped it off and shaped himself a fine club.

Carrying the club in his hand, he stuck the axe back into his belt, swung his knapsack and the saw over his shoulder, and started on. When he got out of the woods, he looked all around. Where was the ring? There it lay on the ground at his feet, waiting for its master.

Ivan sat down and ate his lunch, and lay down for a nap. When he woke, he saw that the ring was spinning round and round. Then off it started again down the road. It led Ivan to the bank of a river, rolled down the sandy bank into the water and floated across. Ivan rolled up his trousers and started to wade across after it, but

he couldn't find a shallow place. He tried to swim, but the river began to roar. It threw up mighty waves and hurled him back on the bank.

What should he do?

Well, Ivan didn't spend much time wondering about that. He took his axe and saw and set to work to build a bridge across the river. The self-sawing saw cut down the trees. Ivan sharpened them on the ends with his axe so he could use them as piles to hold up his bridge.

He put one of the piles on his shoulder and waded out into the water, but the swift current washed him off his feet. He tried standing at the

edge and, taking up his club, began to drive in the first pile. The club jumped out of his hands and began to do the work all by itself!

The self-sawing saw cut the trees down, the club hammered them into the bottom of the river by itself, and in the twinkling of an eye there was a bridge!

"Well, that is no ordinary club I got in those woods!" he said. "A self-hammering club!"

And over the bridge he walked to the other side of the river. He took a look around. There was the ring climbing up the sandy bank.

Now the river calmed down and rippled along

smoothly. Then it lapped at Ivan's feet.

"Aha!" said Ivan, "so you are tamed, are you? I'm your master now. Well, you don't get off without paying me something for all the trouble

you made me. The mountains gave me a self-sawing saw, the woods gave me a self-pounding club. I'm not going to leave you empty-handed."

The river bubbled, threw up a foam-tipped wave and tossed a long towel out onto the bank. It was white down the center with gayly colored flowers and trees embroidered along the borders.

Ivan looked at it in surprise.

"Now what good will that do me? Well, I'll take it along anyway. Maybe it will come in handy someday."

The ring rolled on. Ivan walked after it. Woods and plains were left behind. Wherever

he looked, there was nothing to be seen but sand, sand, and more sand. The sun was scorching. There was not a stream or a well in sight.

Ivan was exhausted. His feet grew heavy as they sank into the sand. He was thirsty and there was nothing to drink. But the ring kept rolling right along, now burrowing in the sand, now glimmering out on top of it.

Suddenly a wind came up and began to heap the sand up into huge piles. In a short time the whole desert was covered with mountains of sand that seemed to be trying to bury Ivan. But he managed somehow to keep staggering along.

The wind grew fiercer, as if it were angry at a stranger's having dared to enter its domain. The sand swirled around in great whirlwinds that reached clear up to the sky. The sun was hidden behind clouds of sand. Ivan was afraid. How was he to

fight sand? His saw couldn't help, nor his club. Could you stop wind with a club?

"I'll go back to the river," he said. "I'll have a drink of water and take a rest. But what about the ring?"

He tried to pick up the ring, but it dodged and wouldn't let him get hold of it. He kept on trying. Finally he caught it and stuck it into his pocket. Then he started back towards the river.

But the ring jumped out of his pocket and went rolling off in the opposite direction. Ivan kept going back towards the river, but the little ring rolled right along the other way.

Ivan walked and walked. Soon he knew that he was lost. No matter where he looked, all he could see were mountains of sand, each one exactly like the other. He felt in his pocket for the ring. There was no ring there!—It had rolled the other way!

"Now," he thought, "I am lost for good. How shall I ever find my way without the ring?"

He sat down on the sand. He couldn't take another step. The wind kept on blowing and blowing; it was covering him with sand.

"Well," he said, "I have certainly not found any fortune! That beautiful girl played a trick

on me. I'm going to starve to death. I wish I had taken the other road. At least I should always have had enough to eat then."

He felt in his knapsack. There wasn't a bit of bread left. He turned the knapsack upside down and shook it. Out fell the horn the beautiful maiden had given him. Ivan had forgotten it entirely. How delighted he was. He remembered what the maiden had told him.

Picking up the horn, he raised it to his lips and blew.

"Help me, horn," he cried, "for I am done for!"

It happened that the beautiful maiden was at

this moment sitting in her bedroom in front of a mirror, combing her hair. Suddenly she stopped and listened. The horn was blowing somewhere.

Now the maiden's mirror was a magic mirror. When she looked into it, she saw the desert and the lad sitting there in the sand. She picked up the magic mirror and said,

"You didn't obey me. You went back. You gave up. But I will forgive you this time. Take the towel the river gave you; throw it on the sand."

Ivan took the horn away from his mouth and out of it came the words of the beautiful maiden.

So he threw the towel down on the sand and the most wonderful thing happened. A river

flowed where the towel fell—a river straight as an arrow. On each side of the river, where the flowers and trees were embroidered, real flowers and trees were growing. The desert blossomed into a wonderful garden. The trees were loaded with apples, and birds were hopping about among the branches.

First Ivan took a big drink of water, then ate some of the apples and walked about the garden.

There were real apples everywhere, but one tree had especially bright ones. He picked one of these and saw that it was not an ordinary apple. It was of crystal and glowed as if it had a fire

inside it. He put the crystal apple into his pocket and started out to see if he could find his ring.

"Where in the world do you suppose my little ring is?" he wondered.

Just then the ring clinked on the pebbles at his feet as if to say, "Here I am!"

At once it started rolling on again. This time Ivan followed. He didn't take his eyes off it.

Suddenly a black crevice yawned across the road. The ring rolled up to it, stopped a moment, then plunged right down into it.

Ivan looked down into the crevice. It was so deep he couldn't see the bottom.

Now, what was he going to do? He would have to climb down after the ring.

He went into a thicket, cut some rushes and wove himself a long rope. He tied one end of the rope to a tree, dropped it into the crevice and began letting himself down the rope.

When he came to the end of the rope he hadn't reached bottom yet. But his feet found a ledge sticking out from the side of the crevice, where he could get a foot-hold, and he clung there feeling about the wall with his hands. It was pitch dark. There were bats flying about in the darkness. Their claw-like wings scratched his face.

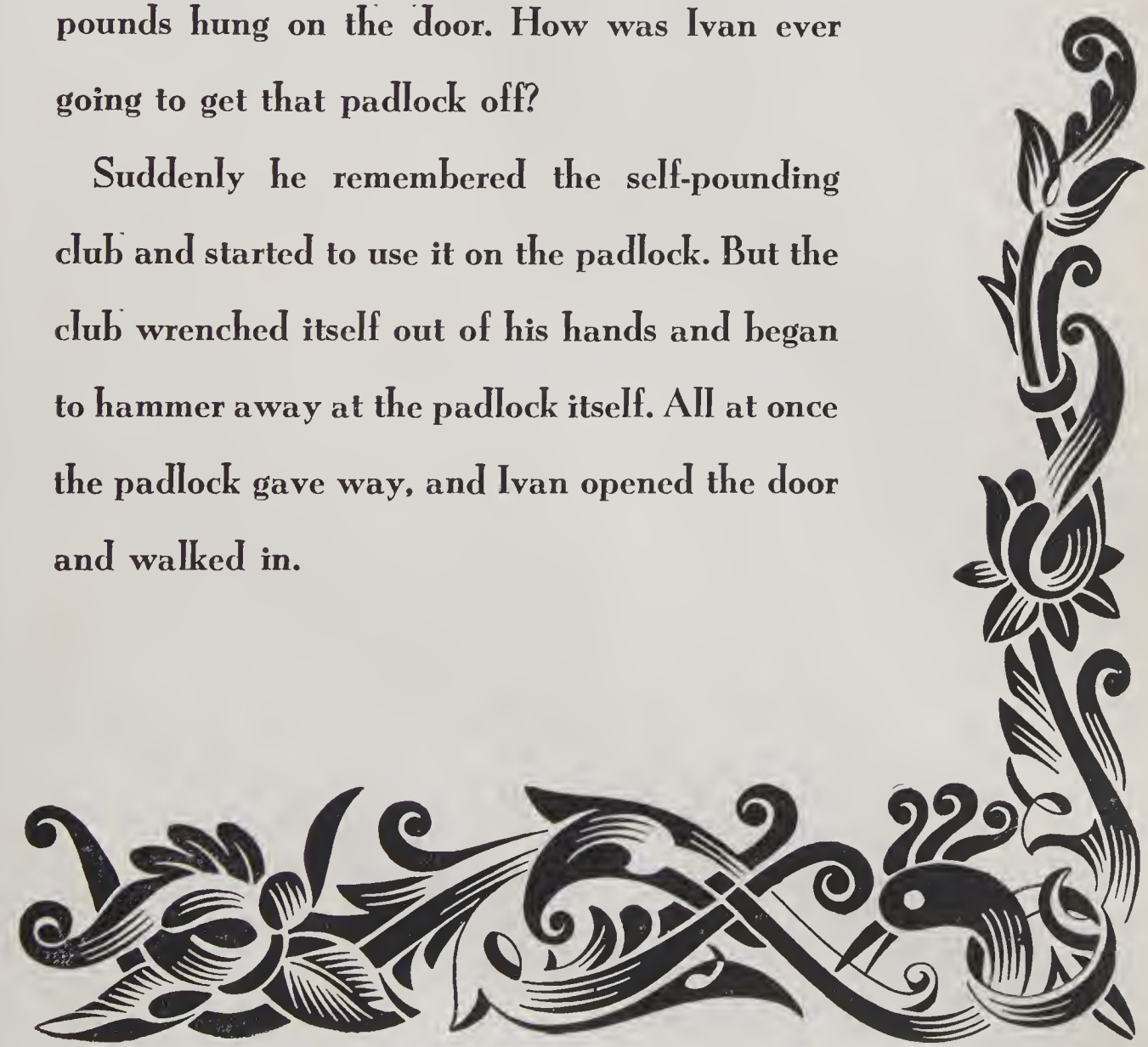
Suddenly he noticed a tiny ray of light shining out of his coat. He put his hand into his pocket and there was the crystal apple. It glowed like fire and lighted up the whole underground cave. The bats flew away from the bright light.

Now Ivan discovered some steps in the wall and began to climb down them. He went down and down—a hundred times a hundred steps. Then he looked below him, and there was the little ring bouncing along from step to step ahead of him.

At the bottom, Ivan stopped to take a look around. Copper walls gleamed on all sides. The floor was paved with copper slabs. The domed

ceiling was of copper. The ring clinked as it rolled over the copper paving. Ivan followed along after it. The ring ran up to a big bronze door, rolled under it and disappeared from sight. A huge silver padlock that weighed about one hundred pounds hung on the door. How was Ivan ever going to get that padlock off?

Suddenly he remembered the self-pounding club and started to use it on the padlock. But the club wrenched itself out of his hands and began to hammer away at the padlock itself. All at once the padlock gave way, and Ivan opened the door and walked in.



Inside everything was of glittering silver. The walls were silver; the vaulted ceiling was silver; the floor was silver.

Ivan was delighted.

"Now I have found my fortune!" he said and

he began to stuff his knapsack with silver.

Suddenly he remembered about the ring. Where was it? He looked around and there it was already away ahead.

"What a nuisance! It won't let me stop for a second!" said Ivan crossly.

He started on to catch up with the ring. But it kept ahead of him and ran along the floor until it came to the other end of the place. Then it rolled out of sight under the silver door.

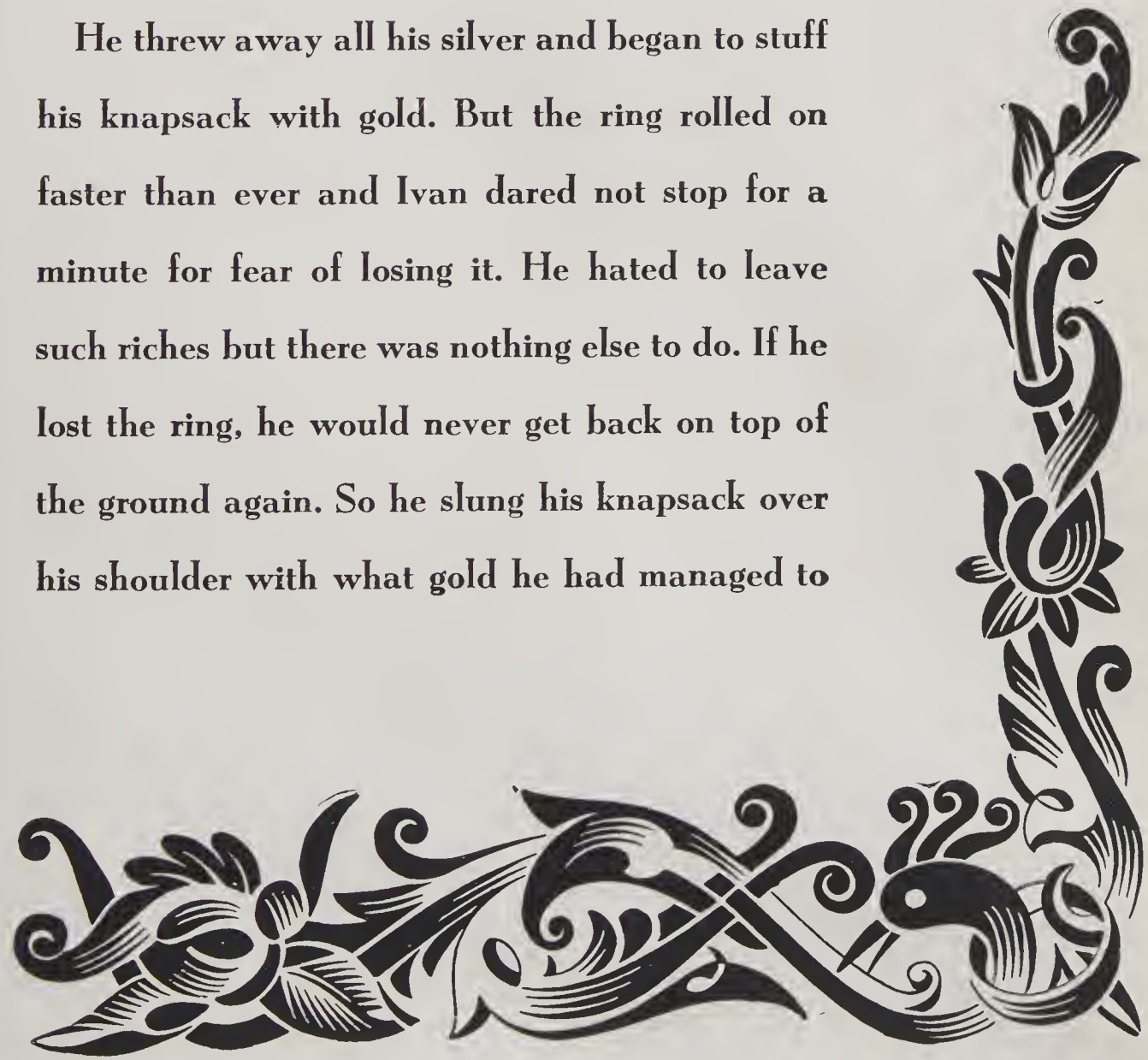
Now this door was fastened with a gold padlock that weighed about two hundred pounds. Ivan waved his club in the air. It began to pound on the padlock and knocked it crashing to the floor.

Opening the door, he stopped short. His mouth dropped open. Everything in sight was gleaming gold. The glare of it almost blinded him. The walls were golden; the floor was golden; the ceil-

ing was golden. Ivan gasped with joy.

"Thank you, thank you, little ring," he said. "You knew better than I where my fortune was. I'll take a lot of gold and I'll be the richest man in the world!"

He threw away all his silver and began to stuff his knapsack with gold. But the ring rolled on faster than ever and Ivan dared not stop for a minute for fear of losing it. He hated to leave such riches but there was nothing else to do. If he lost the ring, he would never get back on top of the ground again. So he slung his knapsack over his shoulder with what gold he had managed to



gather, and ran after the ring. The ring came to a stairway and began to hop from step to step. Ivan took one last look at the golden room and followed the ring up the steps. There on one step stood a chest and the ring stopped beside it. To look at it seemed just an ordinary iron chest. Ivan stooped over and picked it up. And the ring started jumping along again.

When Ivan climbed out at last into the open air he sat down on the ground and started to open the chest.

"Maybe there's a treasure in it," he thought, "worth more even than gold. Maybe diamonds."

He threw back the lid—and there lay a pair of new boots!

"What a treasure!" said Ivan, disgusted.

The ring, meantime, lay quietly beside him, resting. Ivan looked down at his own boots. They were pretty badly worn out with all the walking he had done.

"Well," he thought, "I'll try these on anyway."

He took off his old boots and put on the new ones. He had no more than got them on when the ring started rolling along. And this time it went so fast that he thought he could never keep up with it. He took one step. It carried him clear across a big field. Then he took another and he went right over a clump of woods.

"Whew!" he said. "These are no ordinary boots! They are seven-league boots! I didn't go down underground for nothing! I'll find my fortune in no time with these boots!"

The little ring flew along over the ground like an arrow. Ivan went after it as fast as he could go. Forests and trees raced by. He began to get out of breath. The load on his shoulders felt heavier than ever, but he so hated to throw it away. He began to lag

behind the ring. Soon he came to some marshes and found it harder than ever to get along with the heavy load on his back. First he sank up to his knees, then up to his waist in the swampy ground. Suddenly, from somewhere a knife came flying through the air as if some invisible enemy were attacking him. The knife came right at him and cut a big gash in his chest. Blood gushed from the wound. Ivan wanted to grab his enemy. But how could he, when there was no enemy in sight?

He waved his arms about but could find nothing but empty air. The invisible enemy kept right

on slashing away at him, now from behind, now from the side, blow after blow.

Ivan reached into his knapsack, threw all his gold away and got out his horn. He raised it to his lips and blew.

"Help!" he shouted.

The beautiful maiden heard the sound of the horn, loud and clear. She looked into her mirror and saw Ivan stuck in the marsh up to his waist, blood flowing from his wounds. She spoke sternly into the mirror this time.

"You don't obey me at all, young fellow! I told you not to take any silver or gold. You see, your

own greed will be the death of you."

"Help me, fair lady!" begged Ivan. "I will always do what you say hereafter, always!"

The beautiful maiden felt sorry for him.

"Well, all right. I will help you this one more time. But if you disobey me a third time, you had better not call for help again. This is my advice: when your enemy comes at you and tries to slash you with his knife, stretch your arms up high and try to grab for his hat. It is not an ordinary hat; it is a Fortunatus cap that makes him invisible."

Ivan followed the maiden's advice, and after

trying several times, he managed to get hold of the magic cap. The moment he snatched it off his enemy's head he could see who was attacking him—just a tiny little dwarf!

Ivan made one swing with his club at the dwarf's head and that was the end of him.

hen, as he struggled out of the swamp, Ivan looked around for the ring. There it was, rolling along. How happy he was to find it again! He went after it, singing a song to himself, taking seven miles at a step.

In a short time they came to the shore of the ocean. The little ring jumped right into the water and began bobbing along on top of the waves.

"Bad luck again!" thought Ivan. "I can't walk on the water in my seven-league boots and I can't make a bridge across the ocean. I'll have to build a ship."

He ordered the self-sawing saw and the self-pounding club to set to work. They went to work—they cut down trees and built him a ship in a single night. And it was no ordinary ship, either. In place of sails it had wings. It waved its wings and glided over the water like a swan.

Ivan got in and sat down on a bench in the cabin. Then he laid his saw, his club, his Fortunatus cap, his crystal apple, his magic towel and his talking horn on the floor. He kept his seven-league boots on his feet.

The ring went ahead of the ship to show the way. Ivan gazed out of the port-hole, watching to see when they were anywhere near shore.

Suddenly the ring dived down into the water! Ivan was scared. What was going to happen now? He could never find the ring at the bottom of the sea! But the ship just folded its wings and dived down into the water after the ring. As it glided

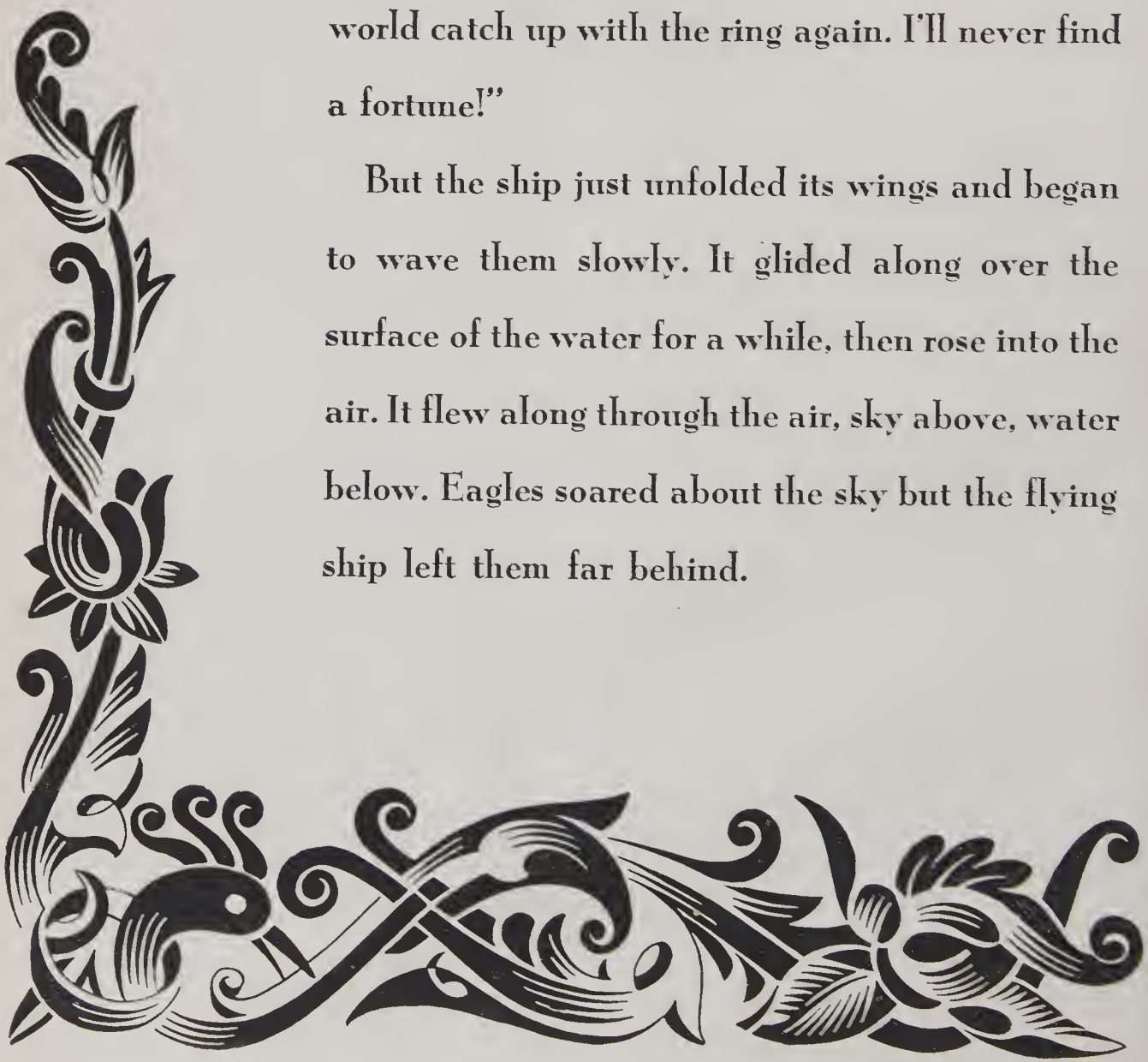
along under water, Ivan could see out through the port-hole. Octopi were swimming around in the water, and the most wonderful garden was growing on the bottom of the ocean.

After a while the ring rose to the surface again. The ship came up after it, as if they were playing

a game of tag. Then suddenly the ring rose up into the air and began to fly along like a bird. Higher and higher it flew until it was hidden from sight behind the clouds.

"Now," thought Ivan, sadly, "I'll never in the world catch up with the ring again. I'll never find a fortune!"

But the ship just unfolded its wings and began to wave them slowly. It glided along over the surface of the water for a while, then rose into the air. It flew along through the air, sky above, water below. Eagles soared about the sky but the flying ship left them far behind.



In a very short time there was the shore, already in sight. The ring dropped to earth like a stone. The ship glided down after it and came to rest on the seashore.

Ivan got out and looked about, and what do you think he saw? There stood his father's straw-thatched hut, and lying on the ground beside it the old, torn fish net. Ivan was dumbfounded.

"How in the world did I ever get back home again?" he asked himself. "It looks as if I have gone all the way around the world and haven't found my fortune after all."

He looked up and there was the beautiful

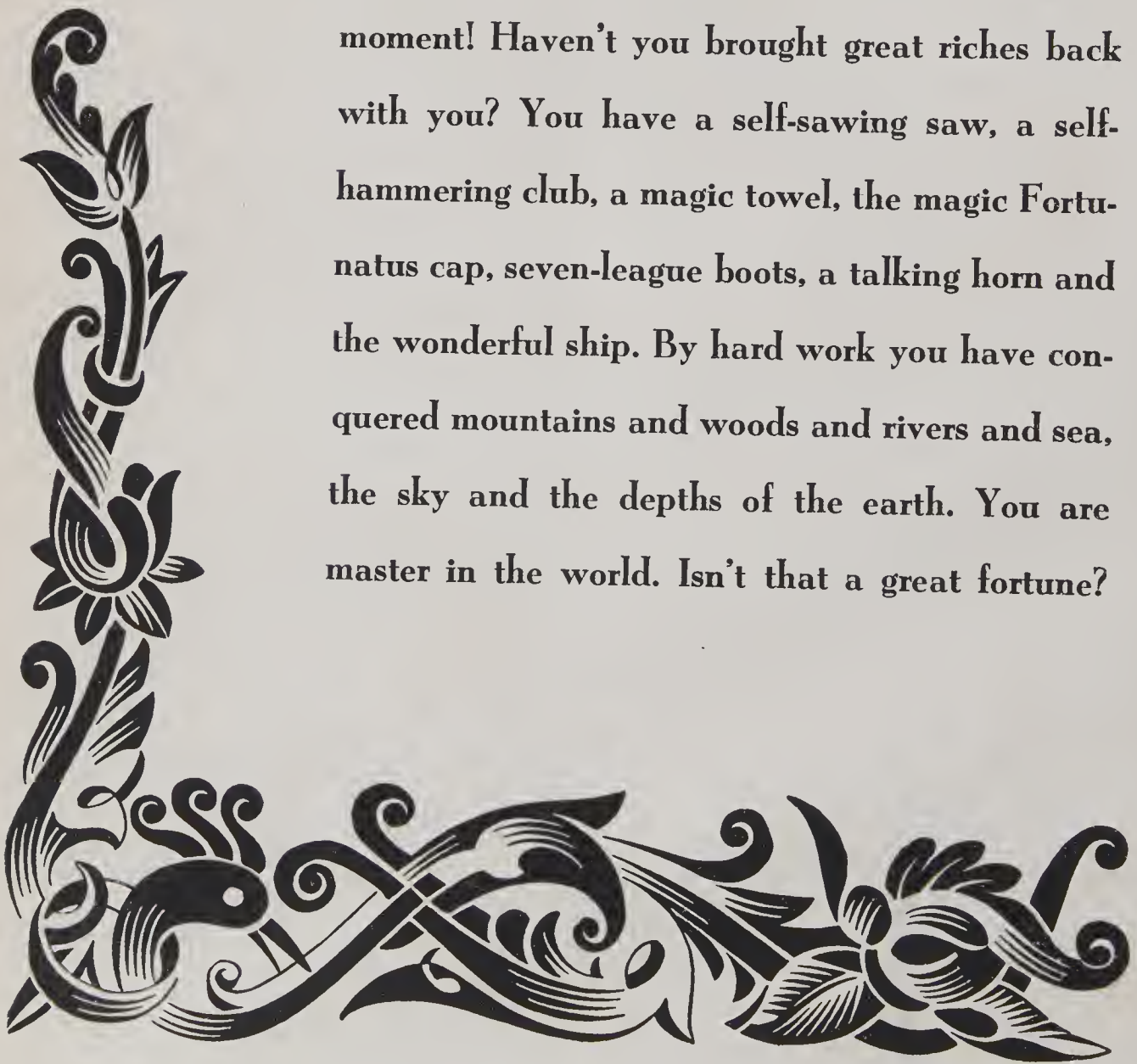
maiden walking towards him. The ring rolled up to her feet, jumped up and landed on her finger.

Ivan bowed to her and said reproachfully, "Fair Lady, you played a trick on me. I went

around the world, through forests and over mountains, across deserts and swamps. I visited the underground world, went down to the bottom of the sea and up into the sky. But with all that I

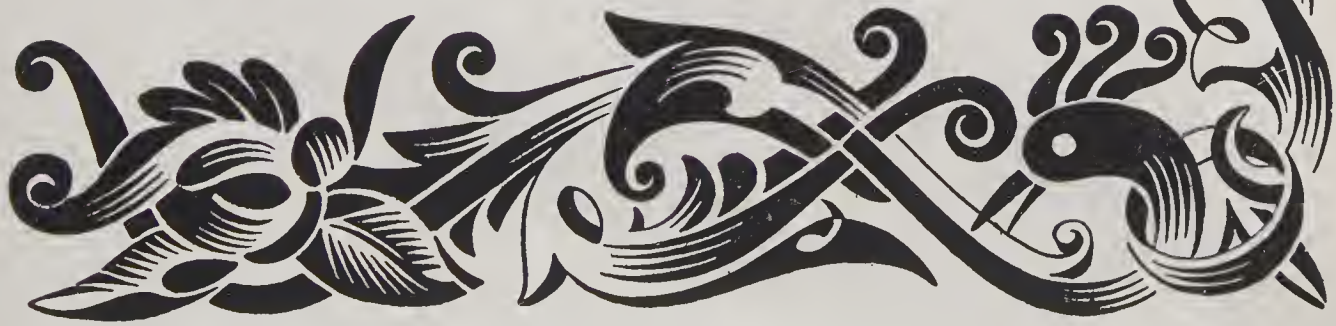
haven't found any fortune."

The magic maiden only smiled and said, "What a slow-witted fellow you are! Think for a moment! Haven't you brought great riches back with you? You have a self-sawing saw, a self-hammering club, a magic towel, the magic Fortunatus cap, seven-league boots, a talking horn and the wonderful ship. By hard work you have conquered mountains and woods and rivers and sea, the sky and the depths of the earth. You are master in the world. Isn't that a great fortune?



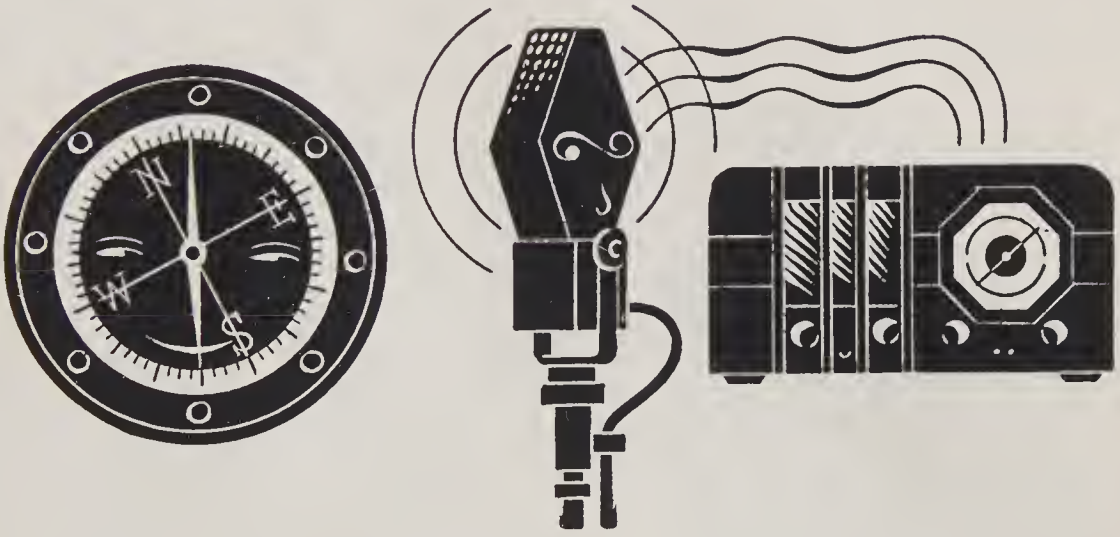
"And there will be more, still. If you will always listen to me carefully and obey my laws, you will conquer not only the earth, the air and the sea, but the stars too!"

End of The Story Part



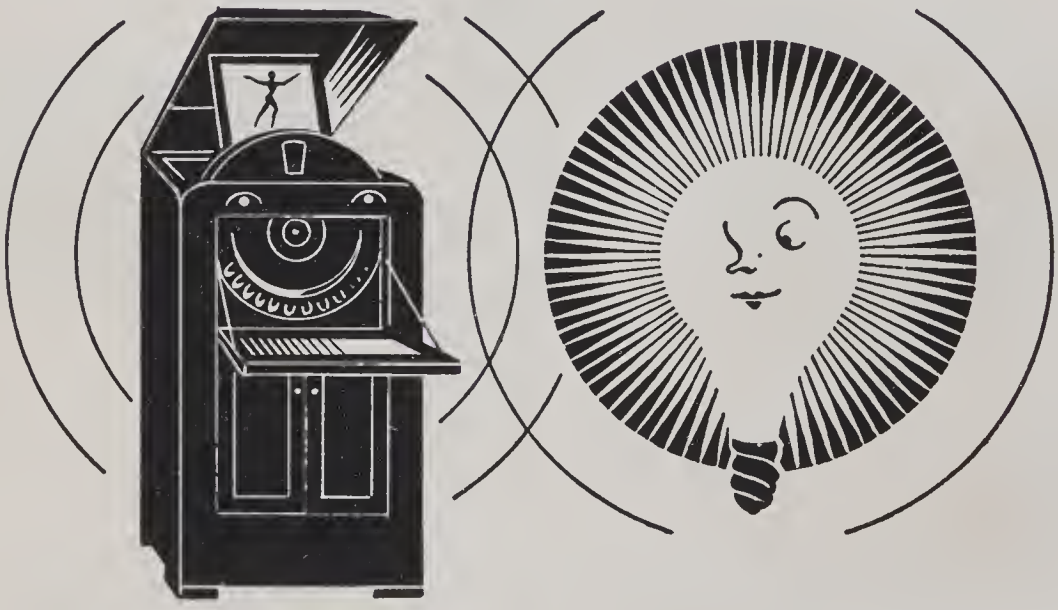
In the old fairy-story books we read about all these magic things—in one about a magic ring, in another about seven-league boots, in another about a talking horn. In this book all of them have been gathered together to make a story for you that is not just an ordinary fairy story. It is a puzzle story. Now let us solve the puzzle.

Is there such a thing as a magic ring? There is. It keeps ships from getting lost in fogs and storms at sea. It guides explorers looking for ores in the mountains through gorges and over steep mountains. It knows where the North is and which is South, which East and which West. What is the name of the magic ring? It is a *compass.*



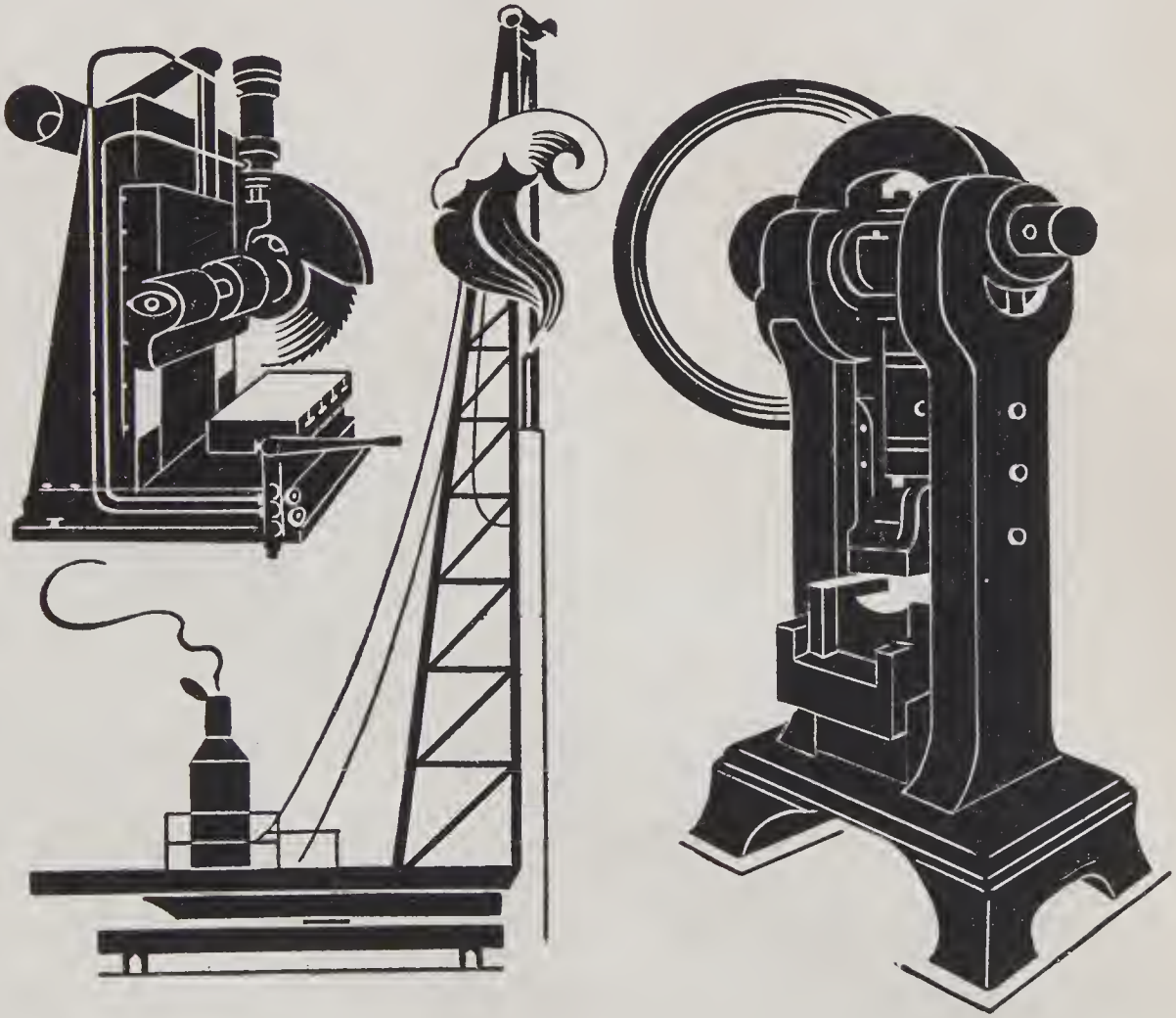
And the talking horn? Fliers take it with them when they go up in airplanes so that they can talk with the friends who stay behind on the ground. It comes to the rescue of sailors when their ships are wrecked. It sings songs, tells stories, knows everything that is happening all over the world. Have you guessed what it is? The talking horn is the *radio.*

The magic mirror, what is that? If you have a magic mirror you can see a play at the theater without leaving home, you can be with friends who live in another city. The magic mirror makes everything near. What is the magic mirror? It is a *television machine.*



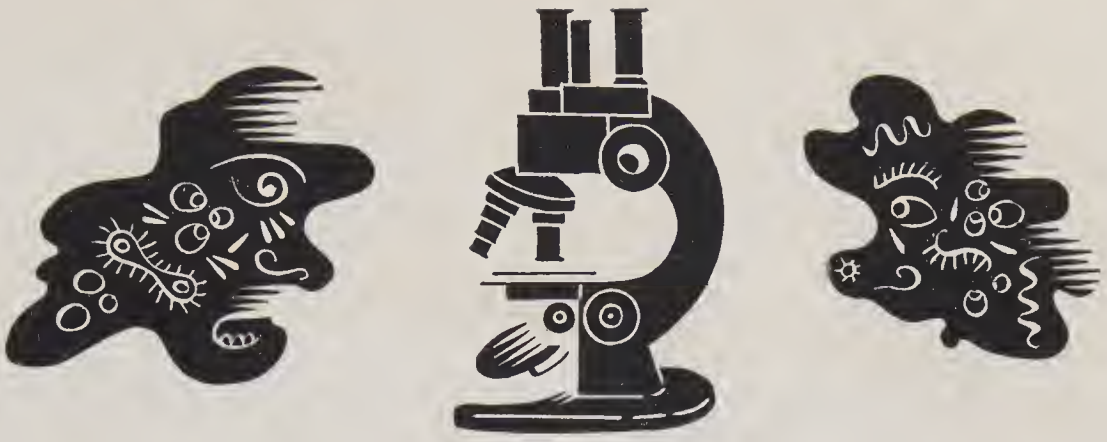
It is easy to guess the crystal apple that shines at night. Isn't there one standing on your table? If not, then look up at the ceiling. There is surely one there. The crystal apple is an *electric light bulb.*

Are there such things as self-sawing saws and self-pounding clubs? Yes. Self-sawing saws cut big logs through in an instant. Self-pounding hammers drive piles in the river bottom and hammer out iron in factories. Look at the pictures on this page and you will see an *electric saw* and a *pile-driver* and a *steam hammer.* People have invented lots of tools that work by themselves.



And many a time you have traveled in the seven-league boots. Remember how the forests and fields seemed to be racing past, how the earth shook under your feet? In one day you covered hundreds of miles. Yes, you slept and ate and read a book as you went along. The seven-league boots are a *railroad train.*

Where the magic towel lies, gardens blossom in the desert, fields are white with cotton balls. . . . Look on the agricultural map of our country for such magic towels—they are the big *irrigation canals* and *inland waterways.*



But what about the invisible enemy and the Fortunatus cap? When you have a sore throat or a fever, it means that invisible enemies, microbes, have attacked you. Can we snatch off the magic cap that makes these enemies invisible? We can. All we have to do is to look at them through a *microscope.*

You have probably flown in the winged ship. If not, you will. Aren't the ships in which people go up beyond the clouds and down to the bottom of the sea magic ships? The *airplane* and the *submarine.*

You see, long ago people used to make up fairy tales about all such things. Nowadays they really exist. By hard work people have actually got the magic things they used only to dream about. They have conquered mountains and fields, rivers and seas, the sky and even the inside of the earth. And that isn't the end. People are beginning now to tell new fairy tales. They are dreaming of flying to other planets, of controlling wind and rain, of turning the whole world into a land of plenty. Will these things come true someday? The old fairy tales have come true. And the new ones will, too, if people will only continue to dream, work hard and follow the advice of Science, the wonder-worker.

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